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An Internship Study of  
Character Education  
in a Middle School Setting

by  
Laureen J. Cohen

A Master's Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the  
Master of Arts Degree in The Graduate School of  
Rowan University

April 1998

Approved by

Date Approved May 1998

## Abstract

Laureen J. Cohen

An Internship Study of Character  
Education in a Middle School Setting  
1998  
Dr. Ronald L. Capasso  
Curriculum Development and Supervision

This internship experience focused on the study of the effectiveness of a formal approach to character education in a small New Jersey middle school. This effort projected student outcomes to include observable student demonstration of positive character traits. The character traits emphasized consist of respect, reliability, responsibility, and resourcefulness. Hence, the name of the project is the "Four R's."

The entire student body of 254 in grades five through eight participated in this study. The integration of one of the four R's into the current curriculum of each quarter served as the means by which the character traits were presented to the students. This comprised a comprehensive curriculum for character education. In addition to thematic instruction, a series of conflict resolution lessons were implemented.

To assess the effectiveness of the program, students participated in a pre- and post-assessment survey of the caring nature of their school community. Also, students completed an evaluative survey regarding the conflict resolution series. In addition to student feedback, the faculty provided a program survey evaluation. The analysis of the data resulted in graphic representations of the findings based on response percentages.

The findings indicate minimal improvement in student adoption of the character traits presented. Further study is necessary to assess the degree to which this formal approach to character development is effective over a longer period of time.

## Mini-Abstract

Laureen J. Cohen

An Internship Study of Character  
Education in a Middle School Setting  
1998  
Dr. Ronald. L. Capasso  
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This study focused on the effectiveness of the implementation of a formal approach to character education in a small middle school environment. In this program, entitled the "Four R's," projected student outcomes included the observable demonstration of respect, reliability, responsibility, and resourcefulness. The findings indicate minimal improvement in this area and the need for further study.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction: Focus of the Study

#### Problem Statement

Although it is a general assumption in our society that values are something taught in the home, they very often are not. Youth violence, dishonesty, disrespect, self-destructive behaviors and a host of other societal ills have been increasing at an alarming rate. Extremely evident in school systems, these social problems demand measures in prevention and reform in education. For these reasons, the staff of Eugene A. Tighe Middle School developed a plan to integrate character traits into the existing curriculum. This was in response to a request by the Home and School Association of Margate. The traits selected included Respect, Reliability, Responsibility, and Resourcefulness. The goal of this integrated and cross-curricular approach was to improve students' relationships with others by providing them with skills in problem-solving and decision-making. The four "R's" selected encompass a number of other character traits generally perceived as lacking in today's complex society such as honesty, caring, integrity, trustworthiness, and fairness.

The expected outcome of this study was the observable manifestation of positive character traits in the student body of the Eugene A. Tighe Middle School which would shape them into more productive citizens for a democratic society. The demonstration of these qualities by the students should provide the Middle School with greater time on task and more effective and efficient teaching and learning. Furthermore, a noticeable reduction in the number of disciplinary referrals and detentions was expected. This would also effect the school culture creating a more caring, task-oriented community. Moreover, the organization would be expected to experience increased collaboration and cohesiveness among the staff as a result of team planning for thematic units concerning the character traits.

The product outcome statements of this study reflected the mission of the Margate School District. Of the fifteen educational goals outlined in the district 1997-98 Handbook, eight were addressed by the character education program. These included:

- Learn how to be a good citizen.
- Learn how to respect and get along with people.
- Learn about and try to understand the changes that take place in the world.
- Understand and practice democratic ideas and ideals.
- Understand and practice the skills of family living.
- Develop a desire for learning now and in the future.
- Appreciate culture and beauty in the world.
- Develop pride in work and a feeling of self-worth and self-respect.

For leadership growth, this study was intended to enable the intern to acquire a shared vision for character education with the staff, the Board of Education and administration, the parents, and the student body. This shared vision should enable the

intern to gain support and commitment from these stakeholders while facilitating staff curriculum meetings for the implementation of the project.

## Definitions

The following terms and phrases are unique to this study and, as such, require definition:

**Character Education** is the teaching of values. This movement has just recently taken a foothold in American schools. However, it has been in existence for a long time. The number of organizations around the country providing resources and training in character education continues to grow as does the need.

**Respect** is a combination of esteem, admiration, and deference to another person, right or privilege. To exhibit the quality of respect pertaining to peer relationships, student/teacher relationships, parent/child relationships, and community relationships was a study goal. Most-importantly, students were expected to gain self-respect through a series of classroom activities across the curriculum.

**Reliability** is the second “R” featured in this curriculum program through activities referring to trustworthiness and dependability. Consistency demonstrated in these qualities should improve student relationships with others and provide for more effective teaching and learning.

**Responsibility** characterizes accountability for certain obligations (e.g., completing homework) and making moral decisions that can effect self or others. Society often asks children to make important decisions apart from the classroom that may greatly affect their lives or the lives of others. Some issues where responsible decision-



making is required include situations involving drug use, sexual activity, crime, and environmental concerns.

**Resourcefulness**, as the final “R,” enables students to confront difficult situations and deal with them appropriately. A resourceful student is an independent student able to locate and use resources required to accomplish a certain goal.

**Indoctrination** is the direct instruction of values and is the most common teaching method used to approach character education. Although many experts in this field embrace indoctrination as a vehicle for character development, it also has critics. Some of these critics, such as Alfie Kohn (1997), abhor indoctrination as it is merely inculcating students with values, denying them the ability to truly embrace and take ownership of those values.

The **Socratic method** is an alternative to indoctrination that is an inquiry based problem solving approach to decision making.

**Cooperative learning** has students performing group work towards a common goal. It is another effective teaching strategy that allows students to develop a respectful working relationship with their peers.

**Thematic teaching** is the inclusion of a common theme throughout the curriculum. It is similar to **interdisciplinary teaching**, which gives students the experiences to be able to find the connections and correlations of ideas across different content disciplines and generalize their learning. They both involve team planning among the staff in order to develop thematic units across the curriculum.

**Conflict Resolution** is a series of lessons aiming to provide students with the communication skills necessary to deal with conflict, peer pressure, and anger. **Conflict**

can be defined as any disagreement between individuals or groups of individuals. This can include **peer pressure**, which is the persuasion of an individual to act against his or her beliefs.

### Limitations of the Study

A valid study of the effects of a character education program on a community requires it to be a longitudinal study. Therefore, a six-month study from September of 1997 to March of 1998 is rather limited. Further, a value system cannot be learned and demonstrated in a short period of time. Each individual needs to understand and personally adopt the values. Also, it is best to imbue values at a younger age. Although the sample age (11-14) is impressionable and experiencing many physical and emotional changes, program effectiveness was still limited. Character development can only occur with consistent positive reinforcement from school, community, and at home. The other factors limiting the success of the study included the socioeconomic status and family make-up of each child.

A study on the effectiveness of a character education program is also limited with the type of data and methods with which it is measured. Subjective observations by teachers were the basis for the data collection in this qualitative study. Accompanying the teacher observations were pre- and post-assessment surveys that were given to the students to elicit their qualitative perceptions regarding the “character” of their school community. Hence, the results of the some of the surveys may be biased due to false responses by students fearful of retribution for an honest reply even though the surveys were anonymous. In addition, some students may have had difficulty with the survey

questions because of age, a learning disability, or a lack of prior knowledge regarding the values in question. This prior knowledge is necessary to answer the questions accurately.

The setting of this study was specific to a small New Jersey shore community, which restricts the generalizability of the results to a larger population. The effects of a character education program such as this would vary depending on the type of community studied. A character education program must reflect the values of the community in which the study takes place.

### Setting of the Study

Margate City, previously known as the City of South Atlantic City, is a small New Jersey shore community on a 1 3/4 mile long island located approximately two miles south of Atlantic City. Governed by a three-person Board of Commissioners, the city of Margate was home to a population of approximately 9,000 year-round residents. However, the summer months in Margate experienced tremendous population growth.

The socioeconomic status of the majority of the year-round population is middle to upper-middle class. The 1990 per capita income averaged approximately \$27, 939 per year with a majority of employed persons in positions of managers or professionals. In contrast, 5.7% of the population was considered to be living at the poverty level. Educational statistics (as of 1990) maintained that 10.7% of the population held a graduate degree; 26.8% held a college degree; 18.5% attended college but did not receive a degree; 27% were high school graduates; and 17.1% did not graduate high school (U.S. Census Report, 1990).

At the time of the study, Margate City enjoyed the lowest tax rate, that of 1.758, in Atlantic County. Of this, 85% was utilized to fund the public school system.

The five religious congregations established in the city are representative of the ethnic/religious distribution in the Margate community. Of these congregations, two are Jewish, two are Protestant, and one is a large Catholic Church. As of the 1990 U.S. census report, the racial composition of Margate was represented by 98% Caucasian residents. The remaining 2% of the residents is a combination of African American, Asian, and Hispanic.

These demographics, though relatively stable up to 1990, have potential for change. Demographic projections of a feasibility study, conducted for the Margate Public School System in 1996-1997, justified the need for the establishment of a new educational facility plus additions to the existing two school facilities. The projections were based on three factors potentially influencing the expansion of the population. These factors included: land development to the maximum density permissible by zoning, increased sale of existing real estate, and “in-migration” caused by the rental of summer homes to the families of Atlantic City casino employees as year-round residences. That study predicates that the transient nature of the community will greatly affect the demographics. For example, the recent feasibility study determined that rental property inhabitants constituted 50% of new students in the elementary school. This statistic negates the 1990 Census Report statistic that only 12.5% of all housing in Margate was renter occupied.

The Margate City Public School System is a K-8 district educating the children of both Margate and the Borough of Longport. After eighth grade, most students attend

Atlantic City High School while a minority attends private nonpublic schools. Current school population in the district is 599 pupils.

The District School Board is composed of seven Mayoral appointed members who serve three-year terms. The Superintendent of Schools is aided by two building Principals and a staff of fifty-four full-time and three part-time certified personnel. There are presently two schools operating in Margate. Union Avenue Elementary School, built in 1953, serves students in kindergarten through grade four. The Middle School, where this study took place, is Eugene A. Tighe School established in 1956. The previously mentioned feasibility study suggested the need for a third school in the district to accommodate increasing enrollments.

The community of Margate City, and surrounding Atlantic County communities, maintains a high degree of involvement with the public schools. The Board of Education acknowledges the fact that the community is a potentially valuable resource for instructional or other purposes. For this reason, community involvement is encouraged in an advisory capacity and as a resource for school programs.

A very active Home and School Association has parents that meet periodically with the administration and staff representatives. They sponsor dances and fund-raisers to pay for various educational assembly programs and the eighth grade graduation dance. Moreover, this character education study was conducted in direct response to a request by the Home and School Association. They are very supportive of the school and its programs.

Also involved in the school system are the police and fire departments. The police organize a Physical Fitness Day with the middle school each year and consistently attend

all school dances and functions, including off-duty officers. The middle school also has a very successful D.A.R.E. (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) program conducted by the police. Additionally, the fire department and other community representatives present school-wide assemblies on such topics as fire and bike safety and beach pollution. The Clean Ocean Action Organization, police, and various city officials recently coordinated a district-wide beach cleanup with the schools.

The educational facility in which this study took place is the Eugene A. Tighe Middle School. The student body of fifth through eighth grade totals 254 students. Of this student population, 15.4 % were classified in the special education program with learning disabilities and 29.5% had been identified for the Project Challenge program for gifted and talented students. In addition, another 20% of the student body were identified for a replacement program in basic skills instruction for reading or math.

The math program in grades five through eight groups students according to ability. These math ability levels range from a standard fifth grade math program to an advanced eighth grade geometry class. Apart from the math program and the replacement instruction for remedial assistance or enrichment, all other subject areas have heterogeneously grouped classes. All students are mainstreamed into the regular classroom to the maximum extent possible.

The staff at Eugene A. Tighe Middle School includes twenty-six certified teachers, half of which currently hold Master's degrees. In addition, there is a school nurse, a district reading specialist, media specialist, and district social worker. The support staff includes three instructional aides and one clerical aide who works with the secretary in the Principal's office. In addition, there are a number of custodial and

lunch staff, and one district bus driver. The cohesiveness of the teaching staff is evident by the team approach utilized in the instructional program. The faculty is grouped into three teams that meet regularly to plan integrated thematic instructional units. This team effort is facilitated by the media specialist who first meets with the Principal, then with each team. Her responsibility includes the direction of the meeting and later summarizing the events for the Principal. The interdisciplinary and thematic approach was the foundation of the character education program under study.

### Importance of the Study

It is becoming increasingly evident that educating students using the three “R’s” (i.e., reading, writing, and arithmetic) is no longer sufficient for providing them with the skills necessary to become productive citizens in a very complicated, competitive society. Values taught in the home today do not mirror those of the 1950’s and consequently, educating students presents a new challenge. Adding character to the school curriculum is a response to concerns over discipline, safety, and order in the learning environment. In addition, there is a long-range goal to perhaps reform an abject society which is perceived as being more caustic than kind.

The school district hopes that, with the success of this program in character development, the students of Margate Schools will begin to demonstrate positive qualities such as respectfulness, reliability, responsibility, and resourcefulness. Consequently, more effective teaching and learning will be able to occur. More importantly, the education of these children with essential values may afford them the ability to affect the society in which they live.

## Organization of the Study

The succeeding chapters of this report will illustrate the nature of this study.

Chapter two focuses on a review of the current literature regarding character education justifying the objectives of this study. Chapter two will also discuss how the cited literature influenced the research design.

Chapter three will further delineate the research design from its inception to its projected future (as the program will continue past the conclusion of this report). This chapter will explain the development and use of the research instruments as well as the analysis of these instruments.

Chapter four presents an analysis of the findings in graphic form of the data collected from the pre- and post-assessment surveys. Also included will be a discussion of teacher implementation of this curriculum, and teacher observations concerning its effectiveness.

Conclusions as to the attainment of goals set by an analysis of the product outcomes for the project, leadership development, and organizational change will be the concentration of Chapter five. This chapter will also focus on the implications the study has on the students, staff and school district. The need for continuing research in this area as well as continued application of approaches to character education will be made clear in this chapter.



## Chapter 2

### Review of the Literature

Recent education reform efforts are expressing a renewed interest in the development of character education programs. The history of education chronicles character development as the mission of schools. Originally, education provided students with the ability to read the Bible. The 19th century McGuffey Reader insinuated moral messages into its story lessons (Huffman, 1993). However, character education as a movement did not originate until the 1920's. Education in the first three decades of the century focused on formal methods to develop moral character in the youth. This endeavor attempted to combat the perceived social instability believed to be the result of advancing industrialization, immigration, World War I, and the roaring 20's (Leming, 1993). This formal approach to developing character died out in the 1960's (Huffman, 1993) but is currently attracting public attention once again.

Education reformers looked to character education as a panacea for the moral decline of the 1920's suggested by the fashions, dances, drinking and smoking of the day (Lockwood, 1991). Today, the resurgence of interest in character education also stems

from our increasingly changing society. A school discipline survey conducted by a radio network in 1940 and replicated in 1980 confirms this societal change. Some of the priority concerns indicated in the 1940 survey included talking, gum chewing, running in the hall, and improper clothing. In contrast, the 1980 survey highlighted concerns such as drug and alcohol abuse, pregnancy, suicide, rape, robbery, and assault (Huffman, 1993).

Thomas Lickona (1996), an expert in character education, identifies the following as factors indicating a considerable need for character education in today's schools: increasing youth violence, dishonesty, disrespect for authority, peer cruelty, bigotry and hate, egocentrism, self destructive behaviors, ethical illiteracy and a degeneration of language and the work ethic. Studies by Berreth and Berman (1997) also indicate a concern for safety and order in the schools. They address the issue of schools using metal detectors, conflict resolution, and violence prevention programs while neglecting to develop character as a preventative measure. Similarly, Philip Cohen (1995) recommends character development as an alternative to punishments and negative reinforcement regarding the concerns over discipline and safety.

The current attention to reviving character education in the public schools is of great interest to the American government and many organizations. For example, President Clinton held White House Conferences on Character Education in 1994 and 1995 as Congress supported a "Character Counts Week." Increasingly, state governments are enacting legislation to implement character education in their schools (Ryan, 1996). They are also providing grants as well as advocating character education through resolutions, conferences, and other activities sponsored by state Departments of Education (Boyd, 1996).

The American Federation of Teachers (AFT), an 875,000 member union, started a nationwide crusade in 1996 to compel school boards to establish and enforce behavior standards for students (Lord, 1995). As of 1995, the director of the Character Education Partnership in Alexandria, Virginia estimated approximately one in every five schools to be instituting some type of character education into their programs (Lord, 1995). Schools choosing to embark upon this type of program can elicit support from a number of organizations established for the purpose of promoting character development in the schools. Among these organizations are: The Center for the 4th and 5th R's, the Josephson Institute of Ethics, the Character Counts Coalition, ASCD's Character Education Network, and the Center for the Advancement of Ethics and Character at Boston University.

Character education is a broad term with many meanings. Lockwood (1991) identifies the goal of character education as simply to promote good conduct so that students will be obedient in schools. Contrary to that assessment, Lickona (1993) defines the development of good character as being able to know values, care about them, and act upon them. These three ingredients (knowing, feeling, acting) are vital to shaping character. In agreement, Kevin Ryan (1996) defines character education as the "formation of moral habits" -- knowing what is good and developing virtuous habits. However, the critics of character education argue on issues of methods, which values to teach, constitutionality, and if moral education is at all the responsibility of the public schools.

The first difficulty encountered when developing a character education program is deciding which habits to teach. A recent government opinion poll discovered that 90% of

Americans support the public school teaching honesty, respect, democracy, persistence, fairness, compassion, and civility (Boyd, 1996).

Similarly, there are many organizations making lists of values to incorporate into character education programs. To illustrate, in 1992 the Character Education Conference developed the Aspen Declaration listing six values: respect, responsibility, trustworthiness, caring, justice and fairness, and civic virtue and citizenship (Cohen, 1995). The Josephson Institute and Character Counts Coalition advocate the same six values. Other values cited by various other organizations include: courage, loyalty, justice, hope, honesty, love, order, tolerance, and truth (Cohen, 1995). These are all values considered to meet Lickona's (1993) tests of reversibility and universality, otherwise known as the "golden rule." Lickona claims that his value lists "define the rights and responsibilities in a democratic society, are recognized by all civilized people, and are taught by all enlightened creeds" (1993). Regardless of who developed the standard value lists, Cohen (1995) suggests that the values to instill in any character education program should reflect those of the local district and community, as communities can vary greatly from one region to another.

Many schools are using successful character education programs. Studies indicate that schools with successful programs have certain characteristics. These are schools that model respect, invite student participation in school life, maintain high expectations for responsible behavior, and provide opportunities and experiences to meet those expectations (Leming, 1993).

According to Thomas Lickona, any character education program must be a comprehensive approach involving all segments of the school in the moral character

growth of the whole community (Huffman, 1993). Using Thomas Lickona as a resource and guest speaker, one school district recognized by Huffman (1993) developed a five-year strategic plan in order to implement their character education program. The events in this plan included:

1. Definition of a set of core values involving the community.
2. Presentation of the program to the staff and community.
3. Integration of the core values into the K - 12 curriculum.
4. Development of a behavior code in each school reflecting the core values (developed by parents, students, and staff).
5. Involvement of all segments of the school community to develop a district code of ethics and then apply it to their role in the functioning of the school.
6. Facilitation of a parenting program for the community.
7. Participation in community service programs.
8. Maintenance of a “caring environment” in each school.

There are a variety of other approaches to character education that also influenced this intern’s study. Many of the existing programs in the nation today found success with innovative projects such as “Value of the Month” and “Virtue of the Week” (Cohen, 1995). Researchers and leaders in the field of character education also support many methods of integration. For instance, Ryan (1996) lists the methods of indoctrination, modeling, the use of heroes and heroines in literature, development of reasoning skills, service opportunities, and the creation of a task-oriented environment. Also, the successful Child Development Project of San Ramon, California includes using

cooperative learning, teaching empathy through literature, using prosocial role models, and providing opportunities to experience helping relationships (Lickona, 1993). Those projects inspired this study which derived its name of the “Four R’s” by choosing a different “R” as the focal point for each marking period. The Four R’s are implemented through the integration of the themes of respect, reliability, responsibility, and resourcefulness into daily school life.

Whether schools select a separate class for character development or use a “word of the week” approach, researchers agree that the most effective method for developing positive character is to provide students with experiences in critical thinking and moral reasoning. This helps to promote good decision-making skills (Cohen, 95). Echoed by character education leader Amitai Etzioni, Cohen believes that in order to develop good character, schools need to promote empathy and self-discipline through decision-making experiences (Berreth and Berman, 1997). One way to do this is through the use of the Socratic method. Elkind and Sweet (1997) support Socratic questioning techniques that encourage critical thinking through problem-solving and ethical issues. This empowers students to make responsible choices without being told what to choose.

Moral dilemma discussion is an approach based on Lawrence Kohlberg’s cognitive-developmental theory of moral reasoning. This approach places the teacher in the role of a facilitator helping students reason through moral conflicts, thus allowing them to progress through the stage growth of moral reasoning (Leming, 1993). This and values clarification emerged in 1966 in an effort to return character education to the public schools. Values clarification is similar to Kohlberg’s moral dilemma discussions. However, this controversial approach attempted to encourage students to “clarify” their

own values through a seven-step process. The teacher accepted all values and refrained from rendering any opinion that may have influenced the students (Leming, 1993).

Thematic instruction provides another vehicle for character development in which a teacher can avoid the often critiqued indoctrination method and promote critical thinking for decision-making. Cohen (1995) recognizes that most schools that use a character education program do so by working character into the existing curriculums. Lickona (1996), though a proponent for indoctrination, suggests accomplishing this integration by using techniques such as cooperative learning, problem solving, and experience-based projects in classrooms to link the value themes throughout the subjects. Moral dilemma discussions can also be used as they lend themselves well to any subject area.

Such thematic instruction receives much support from researchers inasmuch as this instructional approach can be traced prior to John Dewey (Seely, 1995). Howard Gardner's multiple intelligences are addressed through the use of thematic units which enable the student to develop higher order thinking skills, mindful decision-making, and problem solving skills (Fogarty, 1995). Furthermore, students are more capable of uniting their experiences and generalizing knowledge to other areas through the correlation of ideas in thematic, interdisciplinary instruction (Seely, 1995).

Regarding methods of approaching character education, Ryan (1996) holds indoctrination as a viable method as does Lickona (1996). However, this is in stark contrast to noted educational theorists such as Piaget and Kohlberg (Ryan, 1996). Also, contemporary educational reformer Alfie Kohn (1997) has grave reservations about character education, warning that inculcation, or indoctrination, leads to an "uncritical

deference to authority.” He questions the benefit of training students to do what they are told without realizing the value of it. Hence, this reinforces the need for Lickona’s three ingredients: knowing, feeling, and acting. Kohn also emphasizes the “cultivation of autonomy” and encouraging student participation in decision-making. Similarly, Leming’s (1993) studies on the limited research on character education make him doubtful that didactic, moralizing methods alone will have any “significant lasting effect on character.” Furthermore, he is skeptical of the relationship between Kohlberg’s moral reasoning and moral behavior. Leming’s (1993) research studies discovered insubstantial connections between the two, making the use of moral dilemma discussion to affect moral behavior statistically insignificant.

Other studies have been conducted supporting Leming’s statements. Many studies indicate no relationship between values and behavior (Lockwood, 1991). In fact, Lockwood (1991) perceives indoctrination of students with values in an effort to promote socially responsible behavior to be irresponsible. Recent reviews of character education in the 1990’s are reflecting the concerns brought forth in the Character Education Inquiry conducted between 1924 and 1929. This inquiry discovered that the didactic methods of character education were ineffective. Further, the demonstration of good character is situationally specific and the results of character education efforts cannot be generalized from one situation to another. The extensive document resulting from this inquiry concludes “the mere urging of honest behavior . . . has no necessary relation to conduct” (Leming, 1993).

Another concern of critics is deciding which values to teach. The multitude of value lists generated by the various character education organizations can be ambiguous.



Lockwood (1991) claims that these lists do not give “clear guidelines of behavior.” Often, the values listed on them conflict. For example, respect for authority and honesty may be on the same list. However, when placed in a situation where someone in authority asks a person to do something dishonest, moral reasoning is needed. This situation presents a difficult decision if students are simply taught a list of values and not how to internalize and act on them.

Aside from conflicting lists of values, some critics concern themselves with the choice of values on those lists. Many list-makers assume that certain values are universal. Skillen (1993) finds it difficult to believe that any values are common to all in a multicultural, heterogeneous society. He recommends adhering to the teaching of citizenship and public behavior rather than any personal values that may incense some parents.

Character education has been challenged on a constitutional basis. Involving the public schools in the moral development of students is seen by some as a violation of the First Amendment Establishment Clause (Boyd, 1996). Yet, Supreme Court decisions through the years provide support for character education. Some of these decisions include: *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), *Board of Education v. Pico* (1982), *Ambach v. Norwick* (1979), and *Bethel School District No. 403 v. Frasier* (1986). These cases confront issues such as racial segregation, removal of racist or obscene library books, and alien certification for public school teachers. The decisions in each case were founded on the court’s acknowledgment of the role of the public school in preparing individuals to become productive citizens in society. The Supreme Court emphasizes the importance of the transmission of moral values and habits by the schools as an

indispensable means to maintain a democratic society (Boyd, 1996). Additionally, Attorney General Janet Reno consulted with the United States Department of Education requesting that a Statement of Principles be sent to all public school superintendents. This resulted in a United States Department of Education Press Release of August 17, 1995. Part of this document states:

Teaching values: Though schools must be neutral with respect to religion, they may play an active role with respect to teaching civic values and virtue, and the moral code that holds us together as a community. The fact that some of these values are held also by religions does not make it unlawful to teach them in school. (Boyd, 1996)

Seemingly, constitutional challenges to character education on the basis of the Establishment Clause have not held up to Supreme Court scrutiny.

Critics also argue that the moral development of students is not the responsibility of the schools. Indisputably, this responsibility ultimately belongs to the parents (Skillen, 1993). Selecting which values to teach is a value judgment in itself and it is the responsibility of the parents and community to make this judgment (Skillen, 1993). Furthermore, since educators are bound by innocuous methods and curricula to remain objective and politically correct, they are forced to teach to “the lowest common denominator” (Skillen, 1993). Therefore, a minimal character education program cannot be effective.

In order to effectively teach, a teacher must be a model of positive virtues and character traits. Both Huffman (1993) and Skillen (1993) agree that education is, by its nature, a means of character development. However, they adhere to the premise that

imposing the responsibility of moral development on the schools is beyond what the schools can provide for such a diverse society.

Lasley (1997) doubts the success of any character education program based on the axiom that “values are caught, not taught.” He professes that students learn more from observing the actions of those who teach them than from what they are being taught. Therefore, schools send many ambiguous messages such as: “be cooperative,” yet compete for a class rank; “show respect,” yet gender bias continues; and “think critically,” as long as you think like the teacher.

Character education critics and advocates have few systematic studies upon which to base their conclusions (Leming, 1993). Most character education efforts remain to be informally evaluated using anecdotal evidence, teacher and administration surveys, or testimonials of successful program outcomes. For example, informal studies in 1990-1991 surveyed twenty-five administrators in Los Angeles by phone to determine the effectiveness of the programs they instituted. The phone surveys verified decreasing discipline problems, increasing student morale, more involved parents, and greater responsibility among the students (Leming, 1993).

Few studies attempt to control for bias or compare program students with non-program students (Leming, 1993). The Child Development Project of San Ramon, California is an example of a controlled research study. This longitudinal study tracked the moral growth of students over a period of many years. The researchers collected data using an interview method with a hypothetical situation to assess social problem-solving skills. Also, teachers documented specific classroom behavior as observational data. Students participating in the Child Development Project were compared to students not in

this type of program (Leming, 1993). Being a controlled study, the data collected supported character education as an effective means of promoting socially responsible behavior. However, researchers also discovered that the supportive data collected is not generalizable and therefore situationally specific (Leming, 1993).

There are many variables to be considered when designing a character education program. The lack of substantial research evidence in support of or against character education is due to a number of limitations. Among them is the complexity of character development in an individual, the fact that most programs are elementary level programs, and variations within the community framework and teachers (Leming, 1993).

Despite the overwhelming skepticism regarding character education, Leming (1993) cites some methods that can be utilized for implementation into a character education curriculum. Of them, research supports that Kohlberg's moral dilemma discussion approach "works" even though that same research dispels the theory that moral reasoning and moral behavior are related. If not concerned with immediate behavior, this approach would benefit a school concerned with the long-range decision making ability of students as they grow into adulthood.

Cooperative learning is another strategy Leming (1993) cites as having a significant impact on prosocial behavior as well as improving student achievement. As a comprehensive approach to character education is recommended (Lickona, 1993), Leming (1993) envisions a successful program as one in a school with clear rules, student ownership of the rules, consistent discipline, a supportive and fair environment, and positive reinforcement.

It is speculated that the critics of character education formed their opinions based on a lack of research evidence concerning character education efforts. However, Huffman (1995) compares character education to farming: “Teachers plant seeds without knowing much about how the soil and other factors will ultimately affect their germination. Those unknowns, however, do not keep us from making the effort.” The recent character education movement is still growing and evolving. To accurately assess its effectiveness, a longitudinal study is necessary. As a longitudinal study is not possible within the confines of this particular study, informal evaluation methods must be utilized to assess the short-term effectiveness of the program. This study is not dissuaded by the critical views of character education but rather encouraged by the considerable support by its proponents, the government, and the many schools that have embraced this movement.

By embracing the four character traits of respect, responsibility, resourcefulness, and reliability that this study deems essential character traits for citizenship in a democratic society, a wide range of values will be covered. Also, allowing students to develop values for themselves through a variety of experiences in thematic instruction, cooperative learning and moral dilemma discussions enables each pupil to take ownership of those values. Integrating character across the curriculums and in all aspects of school life enables students to make connections with the real world around them. In addition, providing practical experiences in problem-solving with the core values gives students a life-long skill in making appropriate decisions.

## Chapter 3

### Research Design

This research study on character education at Eugene A. Tighe Middle School emerged out of a request by the Home and School Association because of a concern regarding the observed moral decline in the youth of the community. The Home and School Association presented a program called “Character Counts” to the administration and faculty for consideration in November of 1996. Through team meetings, the faculty discussed the possibilities of adopting this program or the development of a similar program. After several months of deliberation and investigating the “Character Counts” implementation in area school districts, the faculty teams agreed upon a modified version of several character programs that have proven successful in schools across the country.

The internally generated program that the faculty designed included the integration of four character traits across the already existing curriculums. These four traits included: respect, reliability, responsibility, and resourcefulness and all the synonyms encompassed by them. The program was aptly titled “The Four R’s” with a

different “R” being the focus for each school quarter. May and June of 1997 began the brainstorming effort to identify natural links in the curriculum of each content area addressing the trait of respect.

It was at this point that the intern accepted responsibility for the leadership of this pilot program. The intern organized a committee of nine volunteer teachers who met in August to coordinate the curriculum charts into an ancillary curriculum and discuss program implementation. This new curriculum included project goals and a list of objectives and activities for each content area that would address the theme of respect without deviating from the existing curriculums. After receiving administrative approval, the faculty received copies of the curriculum reflecting the committee’s contributions. The administration requested the implementation of at least five activities for each marking period theme from each teacher.

In addition to classroom implementation of the character curriculum, the advocacy of the “Four R’s,” and other character traits, became observable throughout the school. Teacher-made bulletin boards, hallway banners, lunchroom discipline, puppet shows and assemblies were a few of the vehicles used to communicate the good character message. Further, the students and teachers enthusiastically participated in a project for a month of kindness entitled “Random Acts of Kindness.”

In November, observations of students and faculty discussions served as an informal evaluation of program progress. This indicated that the outcome objectives were not reaching expectations. However, this is understandable because of the limitations that this type of study poses for short-term results. Therefore, the need to improve the program lead to the initiation of a series of lessons in conflict resolution. This series was

presented to the administration and faculty for consideration. In December, it was introduced to the student body through a whole group assembly. Teachers met in teams to plan the lessons provided by a booklet from the New Jersey Bar Foundation. In January, the faculty began teaching the conflict resolution series to students in homeroom groups on a biweekly basis.

### Research Instruments

Instruments used for the development and implementation of the Character Education Curriculum included curriculum brainstorming charts for each marking period theme. The charts included: subject, theme objective, content, activities, and evaluation. These were used for the development of the curriculum for each quarter.

In order to monitor which activities were actually being executed and add other activities not already included in the curriculum, Character Education Implementation logs were distributed to the teachers. These log sheets requested information such as: the teacher's name, grade level, theme addressed, subject area content covered, and a brief description of the activities.

The pre-made conflict resolution lessons were provided by the New Jersey Bar Foundation and tailored to meet the needs of each class by the individual teachers during team planning sessions. Upon completion of the lessons, students completed an open-ended survey to assess student perceptions regarding lesson effectiveness. The survey asked students to circle the appropriate verb to complete a sentence and then provide a rationale for their choice.



Instruments used to assess the overall effectiveness of the program and to evaluate whether or not the product outcome statements were being met included: a pre- and post survey of student perceptions, anecdotal notes, and a summative survey of the staff.

The pre- and post survey included thirty questions regarding student perceptions of peer relationships and teacher-to-student relationships. The survey, called the School and Community Caring Profile (SCCP), was developed by the Center for the 4th and 5th R's in Cortland, New York. Permission was granted to use this survey with the entire student body as this is a whole group study and no sample was available. It was first administered in September of 1997 and repeated in February of 1998.

Anecdotal evidence from students, teachers, administration and staff was encouraged in February. This month was termed "Kindness Month." Folders hanging in every classroom entitled "Random Acts of Kindness" were used to collect forms asking the observer to note a kind, reliable, or responsible act performed by another person.

Also in February, teachers completed a survey to evaluate the progress of the program. This survey elicited information on the overall effectiveness of the activities implemented and asked for observations of any changed behavior and opinions if that changed behavior could be the result of the Character Education Program. It also inquires as to the amount of influence each aspect of the project may have had on the overall effectiveness.

All of these research instruments are located in Appendix A.

## Data Collection Approach

The curriculum brainstorming charts, originally distributed in June of 1997, were distributed two weeks prior to each marking period to encourage teachers to think ahead to the next theme and attempt to incorporate it into their curriculum. Completed charts were submitted to the intern and coordinated into a comprehensive curriculum.

The faculty received the Character Education Implementation Logs on the first day of school. In addition, a box of blank log forms was made available to the teachers in the faculty room. As teachers completed the forms, they submitted them to the intern who categorized them to provide a portfolio of documented activities relevant to the program. As requested by the administration, all teachers were expected to submit a minimum of five activity logs for each marking period.

Regarding the conflict resolution lessons, a heterogeneous sample of students from each grade level completed a conflict resolution survey. Given to one heterogeneously grouped health class in each grade, the students honestly responded to ten open-ended questions.

The SCCP survey was first administered in September of 1997 to the whole school during an extended homeroom period. Two teachers were assigned to each room to monitor and encourage the students to respond to the survey questions thoughtfully and seriously. The same survey was administered in a similar fashion in February of 1998.

The end of the second marking period marked the introduction of the “Random Acts of Kindness” folders to each classroom. Any forms completed and placed in the folder were collected on a weekly basis. Names of reported students were displayed on a

“kindness tree” in the school lobby for the month of February. Also, the morning announcements recognized these students and their kind acts.

Teachers completed the summative survey at a February faculty meeting to assess their perceptions of the success of this program. Open discussion followed to discuss modifications that could be implemented to improve the program.

### Data Analysis

Throughout the year, the Character Education Implementation Logs were indexed in a portfolio providing documented evidence of curriculum implementation. This enabled the intern to quantitatively monitor the extent to which each grade level was exposed to lessons in good character.

To assess student perceptions, an analysis of the SCCP survey represented the frequency of responses regarding respect in the school community. A comparison of the representations from the September 1997 and the February 1998 survey administrations helped to formulate a conclusion regarding the types of questions to which student responses varied dramatically. Special focus was given to five items on the survey which were scored poorly in September. These items should garner improvement if the program is successful.

To informally assess the degree to which students demonstrated the character traits advocated, the “kindness tree” and its “blooming” served as visual feedback. This provided a quantitative analysis of the number of good deeds reported and types of acts reported. In addition, the qualitative survey of teachers also served as a means to evaluate the demonstration of good character by the students. An analysis of this survey helped to

determine what types of modification, if any, were necessary for the Character Education Program. This was accomplished by assessing the responses regarding improved student behavior and eliciting their suggestions for improvement.

## Chapter 4

### Presentation of the Research Findings

While reviewing the portfolio of Character Education Implementation Logs submitted by the teachers, it was evident that the students have experienced a number of valuable learning opportunities associated with the four R's. The logs document the thematic activities implemented by each teacher. The majority of these logs followed the written curriculum coordinated from the curriculum charts previously completed by the faculty. In addition, many of these logs reflecting the taught curriculum contained new activities that could be added to the written curriculum.

A quantitative look at the implementation portfolio indicated that the fifth grade had been exposed to twenty-four activities concerning the theme of respect, twelve activities in reliability, eight activities in responsibility, and two resourceful activities. The students of the sixth grade experienced twenty-two respect activities, ten reliability activities, seven activities in responsibility, and four lessons on resourcefulness. In the seventh grade, students encountered thirty opportunities to learn about respect, fourteen

regarding reliability, fifteen documented opportunities to demonstrate responsibility, and three that demonstrated resourcefulness. Finally, teachers confronted the eighth grade students with twenty-four lessons in respect, fourteen in reliability, five responsibility lessons, and three on resourcefulness. At this time, the program has reached the middle of the third marking period carrying the theme of responsibility. Furthermore, resourcefulness as a theme would not be addressed as a curricular focus until the fourth marking period. This accounts for the minimal number of activities in those areas. However, the activities and lessons documented are only a part of the experiences in character development provided for the students. Daily interactions with students and teachers, classroom rules and routines, and school-wide discipline procedures also aimed to acquaint the students with the four R's.

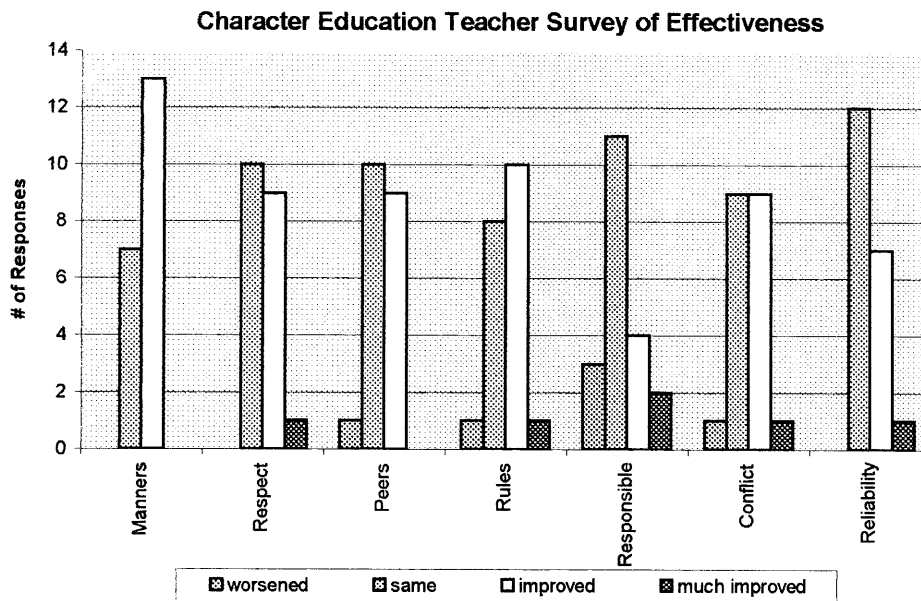
The first quarter theme of respect accumulated the greatest number of documented implementation logs with a noticeable decline in log submission for the second quarter theme of reliability. A total of 24% of the staff did not submit any implementation logs despite numerous faculty meetings on the subject and reminders relative to the importance of documenting the school efforts in the area of character development. Another 24% of the staff submitted less than the requested five activities for each quarter. Moreover, another 24% documented their activities in the first quarter but failed to maintain the logs into the second quarter. Only 28%, or seven faculty members, completed the minimum of five activity logs for each marking period as requested by the administration. These facts may or may not be indicative of the level of dedication to the character education program. There were many opportunities for teachers to address

character development in the classroom that may not have been documented.

However, it is apparent that the level of commitment varies among individuals as well as the duration of their commitment to the documentation of their efforts.

After six months of program implementation, the faculty completed a summative evaluation survey in an effort to assess teacher perception of the effectiveness of the character education program. In addition, the survey attempted to elicit suggestions for improvement of the program. Part A of the survey asked the participants to rate, on a scale of one to five, the level of observed improvement in student behavior since the beginning of the school year (Chart 4.1). If noting an improved rating, participants were further asked to indicate whether or not they believed the improvement be the result of the character education efforts.

Chart 4.1



As Chart 4.1 indicates, the majority of responses considered student behavior to have remained the same or improved somewhat. In the areas of respect, responsibility, and reliability addressed in the curriculum, the majority of responses indicated that the behavior in those areas had not changed. Also, less than 50 % of the respondents indicated some improvement and less than 10 % indicated much improvement in those areas. Since all categories listed are associated with the Four R's of the curriculum, it is understandable that they would all receive such similar results. However, it is evident that the one area of concern appears to be "responsibility." In this area, 15% of the responses suggested an observed decline in responsibility among the students. As the third marking period is presently underway and responsibility was the theme of that quarter, another survey at the end of the school year might provide more encouraging responses.

In response to whether or not the improved ratings were the result of the character education efforts or not: 15 % of the staff indicated yes, 12 % of the staff indicated no, and 20 % of the staff indicated that perhaps it was a result of the program. Being a qualitative study, it is difficult to determine the cause of such improvement. Therefore, the majority of responses in this area were noncommittal.

Part B of the survey asked teachers to rate the effectiveness of the program components on a scale of one to five (five being the highest). Out of a possible total score of 100, the program components were rated as follows (in descending order):

Classroom integration of themes into the curriculum . . . . .	84
Hallway banners and bulletin boards . . . . .	69



Conflict resolution lessons . . . . . 67

Direct instruction through lectures, etc. . . . . 60

Random Acts of Kindness folders . . . . .56

Included in this section was a comment from a faculty member giving a rating of four to teacher modeling of appropriate behaviors. From this section, it can be inferred that the main focus of the character education efforts, integrating the themes of character into the curriculum, was viewed as the most effective aspect of the program.

Part C of the survey inquired as to the need for modification and elicited suggestions for improvement. This section resulted in 60% of the faculty participants selecting that the school stay on its present course with no modifications. However, many staff members checked more than one area. Apparently, the “Value of the Month” suggestion garnered many responses (50 %) with one added suggestion that this idea be used as an expansion of the present Four R’s. Another 25 % of the responses selected “Virtue of the Week.” Regarding the three suggestions for adapting the daily schedule to allow for direct instruction on various topics, 55 % of the participants distributed their votes. Additionally, 50 % of the staff indicated an emphatic “NO!” or “NO WAY” on one or all of these three suggestions. Additional suggestions included increased teacher role modeling and greater staff participation in cross-curricular integration of themes.

This qualitative evaluation suggested that the faculty did not observe dramatic changes, if any, that improved student behavior. Any improvement was not necessarily credited to the efforts of the character education implementation. Nevertheless, the

faculty did rate the curricular integration of the four R's as the most effective means utilized for the instruction of good character.

The other components of the program were also highly rated. As for modifying the character education program, the majority of the staff preferred to continue with the existing program with few modifications such as using a value each month or each week rather than one a marking period. Also, the faculty appeared to be divided on the idea to adjust the daily schedule to allow for direct instruction in values. In addition to the number of faculty members who did not check those areas, there were many who chose to indicate "no." In a middle school with a full curriculum and limited teaching time, it may be expected that there would be disagreement with a change regarding the daily schedule. Also, teacher experiences with the recent conflict resolution lessons on this type of amended schedule may have accounted for the negative responses.

For an overall assessment of student perceptions regarding the caring nature of their school community, the students participated in a thirty-question survey developed by the Center for the 4th and 5th R's in Cortland, New York. The administration of this survey, the School as Caring Community Profile (SCCP), took place in September of 1997 and again in February of 1998. Analysis of the results of the September administration looked for the statements accumulating a high percentage of negative responses. The negative responses on the Lickert scale included the ratings of a 1 or a 2 indicating that the statement was either rarely observed or sometimes observed in the school community. Five of the statements concerned with peer interpersonal relationships indicated a high level, over 50%, of negative responses. These five statements are

highlighted in red on Table 1 and represented alone on Table 2.

To determine if a change in student perception with respect to these five statements occurred, Tables 1 and 2 compared the results of the February administration with those of the September administration of the survey. To examine the comparison, the researcher looked for a decrease in the percentage of negative responses and an increase in the positive responses. The findings showed a slight decrease in negative responses in column one and two, slight increases in the positive responses of column four, and three out of five decreases in the positive responses of column five. The most dramatic, although small, changes occurred in statement number 14 and number 17 where they both decreased in the negative responses of column 1 by 9%. However, statement number 14 increased in column two by 6% improving over the September results.

A total of 240 students participated in the first administration of the survey and only 224 students completed the second survey. The numbers differ because of absentees and transfers. The number of responses to both surveys was high enough to represent a valid sample of the student body and obtain an overall analysis of student perceptions. The minimal changes in the results are of concern but are not viewed as reason to abort the character education program. As noted in Chapter 1, one of the limitations of this study was the time frame. Therefore, the comparison results of this survey were not truly indicative of the effectiveness of the character education program as it had only been in effect for six months. This is a qualitative study that may have many long-range implications with little short-range outcome. Also, the diverse nature of the student body may explain the diverse distribution of responses across the Lickert scale.

Table 1

SCCP Survey Analysis of Student Responses										
240 Responses (9/97) -- 224 Responses (2/98)	Rarely	Sometimes		About Same		More Often		Almost Always		
Question	1	2	3	4	5					
Students:	9/97	2/98	9/97	2/98	9/97	2/98	9/97	2/98	9/97	2/98
1. treat schoolmates with respect.	8%	3%	28%	24%	33%	28%	20%	37%	10%	8%
2. respect others' property.	7%	7%	26%	21%	28%	36%	27%	24%	12%	11%
3. behave respectfully toward teachers.	3%	0%	16%	14%	20%	19%	38%	51%	22%	16%
4. respect other school staff	4%	4%	21%	17%	18%	29%	35%	32%	20%	19%
5. treat school property with respect.	6%	4%	19%	17%	27%	28%	29%	35%	19%	16%
6 behave respectfully toward parents	3%	2%	8%	11%	17%	13%	30%	33%	42%	41%
7. share with others.	7%	8%	30%	18%	25%	29%	28%	33%	8%	11%
8. care about and help each other.	26%	22%	35%	26%	20%	28%	11%	16%	7%	8%
9. refrain from put-downs.	19%	18%	24%	23%	30%	33%	16%	21%	11%	4%
10. work well together.	3%	4%	22%	11%	21%	24%	35%	37%	18%	24%
11. respect others' differences.	18%	18%	30%	27%	23%	26%	18%	23%	9%	5%
12. listen to others in class discussion.	5%	4%	23%	19%	23%	25%	34%	30%	17%	22%
13. older students are kind to younger ones.	13%	14%	30%	23%	21%	24%	20%	22%	15%	17%
14. resolve conflicts appropriately.	34%	25%	30%	36%	25%	22%	11%	13%	7%	4%
15. apologize for being hurtful.	19%	17%	36%	32%	23%	22%	15%	23%	7%	4%
16. help new students make friends.	7%	6%	18%	17%	23%	28%	27%	28%	24%	21%
17. try to stop others being mean.	20%	11%	33%	32%	23%	34%	18%	17%	6%	6%
18. try to console saddened peers.	7%	5%	22%	13%	26%	24%	20%	38%	25%	21%
19. are patient and forgiving.	13%	10%	32%	30%	28%	29%	17%	26%	8%	4%
20. show good sportsmanship.	10%	8%	24%	16%	21%	25%	25%	29%	20%	21%
<b>In their interactions with students:</b>										
21. teachers display character qualities...	2%	2%	11%	7%	16%	13%	22%	33%	48%	44%
22. other professional staff display character...	3%	1%	10%	3%	15%	19%	15%	31%	38%	46%
23. non-professional staff display character...	8%	7%	16%	13%	22%	21%	22%	32%	24%	28%
<b>In their interactions with each other:</b>										
24. staff display the character qualities...	3%	3%	14%	8%	16%	17%	16%	32%	36%	40%
<b>Teachers:</b>										
25. treat all students fairly.	10%	14%	13%	15%	19%	18%	23%	31%	35%	22%
26. go out of their way to help students.	3%	25%	10%	2%	8%	12%	27%	29%	52%	54%
27. listen to students and are approachable.	6%	10%	16%	8%	16%	21%	22%	26%	36%	34%
28. respect, care about and help each other.	2%	2%	5%	4%	11%	7%	27%	26%	54%	62%
29. The school respects & welcomes parents.	4%	0%	7%	3%	11%	21%	28%	26%	49%	48%
30. Parents support and work with the school.	1%	3%	10%	4%	15%	15%	28%	42%	44%	37%

Table 2

SCCP Student Responses	Items Totaling 50% or more negative responses for Sept. 1997									
	Rarely	Sometimes		About Same		More Often		Almost Always		
	1	2	3	4	5					
Question	9/97	9/97	9/97	9/97	9/97	2/98	2/98	2/98	2/98	2/98
Students:	2/98	2/98	2/98	2/98	2/98	2/98	2/98	2/98	2/98	2/98
8. care about and help each other.	26%	35%	20%	11%	7%	28%	16%	16%	7%	8%
11. respect others' differences.	18%	30%	23%	18%	9%	26%	23%	23%	9%	5%
14. resolve conflicts appropriately.	34%	30%	25%	11%	7%	22%	13%	13%	7%	4%
15. apologize for being hurtful.	19%	36%	23%	15%	4%	23%	23%	23%	7%	4%
17. try to stop others being mean.	20%	33%	23%	18%	6%	34%	17%	17%	6%	6%

To assess the perceived effectiveness of the conflict resolution series, an open-ended survey was given to a sample of ninety-one students. Heterogeneously mixed, this sample was representative of all students from grades five to eight and the results of the survey were generalizable to the student body.

The majority of the sampled students expressed negative attitudes toward the conflict resolution lessons and the behavior of their classmates. The survey indicated that 59% of the students surveyed disliked the conflict resolution lessons and 67% felt that their classmates did not seem interested in the lessons. However, an overwhelming majority had a clear understanding of the reason for the lessons. When asked about the effectiveness of the sessions, 64% claimed that students do not generally demonstrate better listening skills, 69% did not feel that conflicts were held in a calmer manner, and 68% did not feel that students deal with anger more appropriately. A small majority, 55%, of the surveyed students asserted that the conflict resolution program was necessary because of the lack of conflict resolution skills demonstrated by their schoolmates but 57% felt that the sessions offered were not worthwhile and should not be continued.

Open-ended responses on the survey informed the intern that students found that direct instruction in conflict resolution was boring and beneath their intelligence level. Students from grades five and six did offer appreciative statements about the lessons feeling that the concepts are relevant. However, many of the students stated that they know these conflict resolution skills but choose not to act on them. The same was true of the seventh and eighth grade responses. These comments were more sarcastic and impertinent but communicated a similar message that they felt too old for this type of

class session. The statements overall indicated the students' disregard for the content of the lessons as they perceived it to be redundant indoctrination.

Because it is difficult to quantify the product, the results of a character education program are generally qualitative. As such, the Random Acts of Kindness component of the program implemented in this study has proven to be a viable measure of qualitative data. The observable "good deeds" of students and teachers throughout the month of February were recognized regularly through the morning announcements and at assemblies at a rate of six or seven a day. Also, a central hallway bulletin board display reported deeds on a "kindness tree." As a result of this project, staff often observed students looking for "good deeds" to perform for the honor of being recognized. Furthermore, they verbally recognized the kindness in other schoolmates indicating that they can identify kindness in action.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusions, Implications, and Further Study

Data collected from the various surveys administered represents short-term study results. The SCCP surveys and the conflict resolution survey administered to the students indicated minimal improvement in student attitude and an apparent resistance to direct instruction. Also, the summative evaluation completed by the teachers indicated that, though not a failure, the character education program did not succeed in its mission to create a more respectful, reliable, responsible, and resourceful student body. Therefore, further study would be necessary to assess overall, long-term effectiveness of a character education program such as this one.

A comparison of the results of the SCCP survey administered in September of 1997 and again in February of 1998 indicated a minimal change in student perceptions regarding the caring nature of their school community. In the September administration of the survey, five items served as a measure of improvement as students scored these items negatively at that time. When compared with the results of the February survey administration, the improvement seemed minimal. Comparing all of the thirty items on



the September survey to the February survey demonstrated insignificant changes in student perceptions. Some attitude changes improved while some declined. The insignificant nature of these results cannot be construed as being the direct result of the character education efforts. Any positive growth can possibly be the result of normal student growth and development and also of becoming more comfortable in the school environment. Likewise, any negative changes in response could also be attributed to comfort in the school environment. Because of this variable, students had more opportunity to observe the factors questioned in the survey.

The hypothesis, therefore, is that any change in student attitude on the SCCP survey can be attributed to a number of variables and is not necessarily the product of the character education program. This does not mean that the character education program should be abandoned or never attempted. On the contrary, as many students come from homes where values are not taught and are not given priority, school may be the only place where the universal values can be learned. Perhaps the results of this short-term study did not meet the original expectations of the research proposal. However, as these students grow into adulthood, the potential to apply something they have learned in school to some future life situation is greater than if the character education program never existed.

Possibly, the most profoundly successful aspect of the character education program was the Random Acts of Kindness project. The immediate feedback received through morning announcements and recognition on the bulletin board served as positive reinforcement. This is the most effective form of behavior modification, to which many behavioral researchers can attest.

The school-wide conflict resolution lessons used direct instruction to teach students strategies to resolve conflicts through communication skills, controlling anger, and avoiding peer pressure. Results of the conflict resolution surveys given to students support the statements of Alfie Kohn (1996) criticizing the use of direct instruction or indoctrination. The great percentage of students who considered the time spent learning conflict resolution skills as wasted indicates that direct instruction in these types of issues is not well received. The comments on their open-ended responses to the survey vehemently expressed student frustration over this type of indoctrination. They found it boring, repetitive, and “corny.” Even though students appeared to participate and enjoy the lessons, it is apparent by these surveys that their participation was merely compliance to a school routine. This is the reason for Kohn’s apprehension regarding the use of direct instruction, as discussed in Chapter Two. Although leaders in the field of character education such as Kevin Ryan and Thomas Lickona advocate the use of direct instruction, some modifications are necessary to be effective. Modifications to consider include shorter lessons, relevant concepts that have not been previously taught, and engaging teaching strategies. In addition to the character education curriculum developed, the “teachable moment” is an opportunity to integrate the direct instruction of a relevant value into the lesson of the day. In this way, direct instruction becomes more meaningful to students than scheduled lessons on pre-determined topics of low interest to students.

The coordination of this character education program for the Eugene A. Tighe Middle School provided numerous opportunities for leadership growth and development. Namely, the difficulty in gaining commitment for the project from all involved was one learning experience. Those involved included the Board of Education, administration,

faculty, staff, students, parents, and the community. Effective communication skills were necessary to communicate and acquire support for the vision of this program. This was accomplished through faculty meetings, updates on program progress, and presentations to the Home and School Association. In the faculty meetings, teachers were empowered to make decisions regarding the program, given common planning time to discuss the various aspects of the program and contribute to the comprehensive curriculum. Once the curriculum was coordinated, the faculty reconvened to review and give their input on the curriculum. Also, the mid-year summative evaluation survey empowered the teachers to make decisions concerning the future of the program.

The intern, as coordinator of this character education effort, located the necessary resources to survey the students and designed several other assessment instruments. In addition, conflict resolution lessons were added to the program in the middle of the school year in response to informal evaluations indicating the need for a more concerted effort. The evaluation of the program and search for improvements continues as all stakeholders find this to be a valuable endeavor worth expanding.

The organization has changed as a result of the “Four R’s” character education program becoming a part of the school culture. The mission of this institution is apparent to any visitor through the use of thematic posters in every classroom and encouraging banners and bulletin boards adorning the hallways. Also, the Random Acts of Kindness, which began as a temporary project, became infused through the fabric of the school community. This occurred by increasing the number of good deeds, making them more observable and recognized on a regular basis.

The organization also adopted a new approach to discipline as a result of this

program. Disciplinary procedures include consequences requiring students to think and write about what they did wrong. In addition, the “teachable moment” method of addressing poor behavior has replaced detentions, yelling, or time-outs in many classrooms.

Team building was another important change that has occurred through the implementation of the “Four R’s.” Teachers having time to plan and teach together toward a common goal increased the cohesiveness of the faculty. Team meetings were more productive as teachers collaborated and shared ideas for integrating the themes, gaining consistency of homework using the themes of reliability and responsibility, and discussing other classroom procedures and thematic projects.

Character development is a life long process. Any expectation that a character education program can affect the behavior and attitudes of students in their middle school years is arguable. At this age, students have reached a stage of moral development to a point making it difficult to reverse. However, it is possible for schools to influence students’ moral reasoning capabilities determining prosocial behavior. Unfortunately, society also has great influence on children and their behavior. It is a challenge attempting to instill quality character traits in students in an age when television, movies, other media and their environment confront them with contradictory characteristics.

Because of the age level of the students in this study, character education efforts, especially direct instruction, may cause students to reject the message. Consistent application and integration of universal civic characteristics throughout the elementary grade levels into the middle school is necessary to achieve the outcomes expected in this study. In this manner, students would recognize the lessons as part of the school culture.

Further study is required to assess the effectiveness of character education programs as character develops over time. The results of the subjective observations and surveys utilized in this study are not indicative of the success or failure of the program. The nature of the program requires it to be a longitudinal study following students from kindergarten through grade twelve. It also requires comparing these students with a control group of students in another school consisting of similar demographics over the same time period. The control group would not be exposed to a formal character education program to evaluate if the implementation of such a program in the experimental school can truly improve student character. This type of study would require the careful consideration of many intervening variables. Furthermore, this type of study is not generalizable to the greater population, as values differ from community to community and person to person.

Character development is inherent in the public schools as history details. Even without a formal character education program in place, schools develop character through teacher role modeling and maintaining high expectations for student achievement and behavior. It is the ever-changing society that determines the need for a more formal approach to character education. Whichever approach is implemented, there will be some positive effects, although not immediate, and some negative critiques. Regardless, public schools must pursue this worthwhile aim until they discover an effective means of developing good character in students. This depends largely on the community, staff, and individual students as to what method is the most appropriate and effective.

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Appendix A  
Research Instruments



Teacher: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade Level: \_\_\_\_\_

<b>2nd Marking Period: Reliability</b>	<b>Subject</b>	<b>Reliability Outcome</b>	<b>Subject Area Content</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Evaluation</b>

## Character Education Implementation Log

Teacher: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade: \_\_\_\_\_

Subject: \_\_\_\_\_ Date(s): \_\_\_\_\_

**Concept Addressed** (circle all that apply) :

RESPECT

RELIABILITY

RESPONSIBILITY

RESOURCEFULNESS

**Content Covered:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Integration Activity:**

# SCHOOL AS CARING COMMUNITY PROFILE (SCCP)<sup>1</sup>

**Circle one:**    Administrator                      Teacher                      Non-teaching professional  
                          Non-professional staff                      Parent                      Student                      Other \_\_\_\_\_

Respond to each item below by filling in the blank on a computer scan sheet (not enclosed) for the response that describes how often you see the behavior in your school.

	1		2		3		4		5
Rarely			Sometimes		As often as not		More often than not		Almost Always
1. Students treat classmates and schoolmates with respect.	1	2	3	4	5				
2. Students respect others' personal property.	1	2	3	4	5				
3. Students behave respectfully toward their teachers (speak courteously, follow directions, and so on).	1	2	3	4	5				
4. Students behave respectfully toward all other school staff (including secretaries, custodians, aides, and bus drivers).	1	2	3	4	5				
5. Students treat the school building and other school property with respect.	1	2	3	4	5				
6. Students behave respectfully toward their parents.	1	2	3	4	5				
7. Students share what they have with others.	1	2	3	4	5				
8. Students care about and help each other, even if they are not friends.	1	2	3	4	5				
9. Students refrain from put-downs.	1	2	3	4	5				
10. Students work well together.	1	2	3	4	5				
11. Students refrain from picking on others or excluding them because they are different.	1	2	3	4	5				
12. Students listen to each other in class discussions.	1	2	3	4	5				
13. Older students are kind to younger students.	1	2	3	4	5				
14. Students solve conflicts without fighting, insults, or threats.	1	2	3	4	5				
15. When students do something hurtful, they apologize and try to make up for it.	1	2	3	4	5				
16. Students help new students make friends and feel accepted.	1	2	3	4	5				

<b>17. When students see another student being mean, they try to stop it.</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>18. Students try to console or comfort a peer who has experienced a sadness.</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>19. Students are patient and forgiving with each other.</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>20. Students show good sportsmanship.</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>21. In their interactions with students, <i>teachers</i> display the character qualities the school is trying to teach.</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>22. In their interactions with students, <i>other professional school staff</i> (principal, counselors, etc.) display the character qualities the school is trying to teach.</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>23. In their interactions with students, <i>non-professional school staff</i> (secretaries, aides, custodians, bus drivers, etc.) display the character qualities the school is trying to teach.</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>24. In their interactions with each other, staff display the character qualities the school is trying to teach.</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>25. Teachers treat all students fairly and don't play favorites.</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>26. Teachers go out of their way to help students who need extra help.</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>27. Teachers listen to students' problems, and students feel they can talk to their teachers about things that are bothering them.</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>28. Teachers respect, care about, and help each other.</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>29. The school treats parents in a way that makes them feel respected, welcomed, and cared about.</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>30. Parents support and work with the school.</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>

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<sup>1</sup> The SCCP is an instrument developed by the Center for the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Rs, SUNY Cortland, P.O. Box 2000, Cortland, NY 13045; (607) 753-2455.

# **Random Acts Incident Report**

Your  
Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Person Observed Performing a Random Act: \_\_\_\_\_  
Grade: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Incident: \_\_\_\_\_

Persons Involved: \_\_\_\_\_

This person demonstrated (circle all that apply):

RESPECT

RELIABILITY

RESPONSIBILITY

RESOLVING A CONFLICT APPROPRIATELY

OTHER

Briefly describe the Random Act on the back of this paper:

**Character Education Program**  
**The 4 R's: Respect, Reliability, Responsibility, Resourcefulness**  
**Summative Evaluation**

**Part A: Overall Effectiveness**

Please note if you have observed an overall improvement in each of the following behaviors by circling the appropriate level on the scale. If you circle three or four for any response, please indicate if you believe the improvement to be the result of our Character Education program or not by circling Yes/No/Perhaps to the right of the scale.

1. Student manners: raising hand, saying please, thank you, showing patience....

1	2	3	4	Y	N	P
worsened	same	somewhat improved	much improved			

2. Respect toward authority: teachers, administrators, support staff, guests....

1	2	3	4	Y	N	P
worsened	same	somewhat improved	much improved			

3. Peer relationships: student to student daily interaction

1	2	3	4	Y	N	P
worsened	same	somewhat improved	much improved			

4. Following rules: class routines/rules, school rules...

1	2	3	4	Y	N	P
worsened	same	somewhat improved	much improved			

5. Responsibility: homework, class jobs, preparedness for class . . .

1	2	3	4	Y	N	P
worsened	same	somewhat improved	much improved			

6. Conflict Resolution: minor squabbles resolved easily, less fighting. . .

1	2	3	4	Y	N	P
worsened	same	somewhat improved	much improved			

7. Reliability: honesty, less cheating/copying HW. . .

1	2	3	4	Y	N	P
worsened	same	somewhat improved	much improved			

**Part B: Program Components**

Please rate each of the following aspects of this program on a scale of 1 - 5 (5 being the highest) as to the effectiveness of each to the development of good character.

- \_\_\_\_\_ classroom integration of themes into the curriculum
- \_\_\_\_\_ direct instruction through lectures, admonishments, etc.
- \_\_\_\_\_ hallway banners and bulletin boards
- \_\_\_\_\_ conflict resolution lessons
- \_\_\_\_\_ random acts of kindness folders
- \_\_\_\_\_ other: \_\_\_\_\_

**Part C: Need for Modification?**

The administration would like to continue and enhance this program in the years to come as it is necessary that good character be a part of the school culture. Please check any ideas below that you would like to see implemented (there is room to write - feel free to add suggestions).

- \_\_\_\_\_ stay on our present course, no modification necessary.
- \_\_\_\_\_ "Virtue of the Week"                      \_\_\_\_\_ "Value of the Month"
- \_\_\_\_\_ daily 20 minute lessons on pre-determined social skills (new daily schedule needed)
- \_\_\_\_\_ more assembly periods in Homeroom to cover various topics.
- \_\_\_\_\_ a Monday assembly schedule to accomodate lesson time on various value topics.
- \_\_\_\_\_ other suggestions: please attach additional sheets if needed.

## Conflict Resolution Lessons Survey for Students

We have been meeting in homeroom periodically to discuss conflict resolution strategies. We would like to know how effective this program has been. Please help by responding to the following statements honestly by underlining the appropriate response in parenthesis and justify with a brief written statement.

I think:

1. I (*like/dislike*) the conflict resolution lessons because: \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

2. The class (*seems/does not seem*) interested in the lessons because: \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

3. I (*understand/do not understand*) why the lessons are being taught because: \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

4. My classmates (*use/do not use*) better listening skills since the lessons because: \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

5. Conflicts between students (*are/are not*) settled in a calmer manner because: \_\_\_\_\_

---

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6. My classmates (*deal/do not deal*) with anger better because: \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

7. These sessions (*are/are not*) necessary in our school because: \_\_\_\_\_

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---

8. The time spent on the conflict resolution lessons (*was/was not*) worthwhile because: \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

9. I (*would/would not*) be interested in becoming a peer mediator because:

---

---

10. I think we (*should/should not*) continue with more lessons on other topics because: \_\_\_\_\_

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(please list other topic ideas)

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